JOURNAL OF
Social Issues
A Journal of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues

Journal of Social Issues, Vol. 71, No. 2, 2015, pp. 402–413
doi: 10.1111/josi.12118

Psychology, History, and Social Justice: Concluding Reflections

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This article provides a concluding commentary for a thematic issue of the Journal of Social Issues (JSI) dealing with the intertwining of psychology, history, and social issues. First we show how the social issues addressed and the scholarly approach in this journal collection are consistent with the JSI tradition. Then we contend that the questions asked in more traditional areas of psychology and in examining the intersection of history and psychology bear a resemblance. Next we identify three themes that cut across the articles in the collection: the role of social injustice in shaping identities, the depiction of history varies by who describes it, and responses to social histories are shaped by multiple forces. Finally, we consider policy implications focusing on how identities and group boundaries are important in policy advocacy and the use of policy to seek redress of injustices.

The current volume represents an innovative step in examining how psychology and history intertwine in the analysis of social issues. Even if our analysis of the past is incorrect, or if we are unaware of its impact, history casts its shadow on individuals, groups and societies as a whole. Yet most psychologists—even those concerned with contextual factors—have tended to shy away from studying how history gives rise to and in other ways relates to today's social issues. This

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A more fully developed section on how this special issue fits with the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI) cum *Journal of Social Issues* (JSI) tradition is available from

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volume begins to fill that lacuna, bringing forward an engaging sampling of articles showing the interconnections between history and psychology as they help us understand social issues.

In this commentary, we will reflect briefly on how this collection fits with the SPSSI tradition and then explore three topics:

(1) the intertwining of history and psychology,
(2) cross-cutting themes, and
(3) social policy implications.

This issue fits with the SPSSI tradition in three ways. First, in a classic statement of SPSSI concerns, Joseph McGrath (1980), former JSI Editor and SPSSI President, identified the three P's (Prejudice, Poverty and Peace) that he said should be interpreted broadly. At least one of the three Ps can be found in every article in this collection. To some extent, the Ps go hand in hand: multiple Ps can be found in some of the articles. Second, beyond the social issues of importance throughout SPSSI's history, SPSSI scholarship can be characterized by the approach SPSSI members espouse in terms of receptivity to a diversity of methods, openness to multidisciplinary analysis, concern with social issues internationally as well as within the United States, and reliance on theory. This volume falls within the SPSSI/JSI tradition on these criteria, too. Finally, this collection is compatible with Lewin's (1951) classic dictum "there is nothing so practical as a good theory" (p. 169). Virtually every article in the collection is grounded in a theory or intellectual framework.

While this collection of articles addresses classic SPSSI social issues and follows a SPSSI approach to scholarship, it also breaks new ground. Previously JSI has had historical issues celebrating SPSSI's anniversaries (Harris, Unger, & Stagner, 1986; Levinger, 1986; Rutherford, Cherry, & Unger, 2011) plus individual articles (e.g., Krech & Cartwright, 1956) and chapters (e.g., Kimmel, 1997). There have also been isolated articles on how historical events (e.g., the Depression or genocides) influence human behavior (e.g., Elder & Caspi, 1988; Vollhardt & Bilewicz, 2013). JSI's historical publications have frequently focused on the history of SPSSI as an organization and, to some extent, the historical development of the psychological study of social issues. The current collection is a unique SPSSI publication in its extensive focus on the interplay between history and psychological processes operating at the level of individuals, groups and nations. It examines the impact of short, specific events; events that individuals reaching young adulthood at a specific time in history consider important, and ones that span several years. Intertwined with the events, authors discuss key psychological processes including emotions, memory, identity, social representation, and ideas about social justice.

Psychology and History

Outside of the SPSSI tradition, eminent scholars such as Erik Erikson and others have explored the intersection of psychology and history at least as far back as the mid-20th century. In books such as *Gandhi's Truth*, Erikson (1969) applied a Neo-Freudian lens to Gandhi's life. In it Erikson delved into Gandhi's relationship with his father, his identity crisis and what made him a "great man." The focus of the current collection shares a sensibility that Erikson speaks to in his 1977 collection of essays, *Life History and the Historical Moment.* In the preface to this work, Erikson writes of its concern with "the relationship between life histories to the historical moment," and the emergence of leaders and those that followed them and the "awakening of whole groups of contemporaries to the need of inner and political liberation" (p. 10). Nevertheless, this collection is different from Erikson's work in its theoretical and methodological foundations, giving rise to some interests not considered by Erikson.

What questions about the intersection of psychology and history does the current collection identify? Numerous as we shall elaborate. In many respects, those questions are ones that reveal the relations between lives and history, when and how political yearnings of individuals and groups are awakened, and what makes a historical moment meaningful. In this collection, the use of varied methodological approaches and epistemological traditions shed light on questions of how history has consequences for the relations between groups within societies, and for constructing individual psychologies, identities and understanding as well as for how publics participate in framing what is to be remembered.

Methodologically, this issue benefits from the inclusion of interpretative and participatory approaches in psychology and elsewhere. Nearly 20 years ago in the *JSI* (1997) issue on transforming psychology, Tolman and Brydon-Miller wrote that it matters to the field of psychology that these methods are used to "produce important information, complex, socially useful, politically powerful, and potentially disruptive knowledge about human psyches, processes, behavior, and relationships" (p. 598). This collection benefits as well from experimental and survey studies that demonstrate history is also present in ways that can shift self-representations and performances, intergroup relations, and may (or may not) organize autobiographical accounts. Thus, these latter approaches reveal as poignantly as do interpretative and critical inquiry that history, in its psychological consequences, is more than "what happened."

In a 1997 essay, Burman argued there is a "*non*commensurable character between qualitative and quantitative research, that is, as neither necessarily competing nor complementary" (p. 795). The incommensurate nature of the qualitative and quantitative studies in this collection is, in many ways, a methodological strength of the articles and expands the range of questions addressed.

In studies relying on interviews and narrative accounts, Lykes and Hershberg (2015), Hunter and Rollins (2015), Schwartzman (2015), Stewart, Winter, Henderson-King, and Henderson-King (2015), and Greenwood (2015) all conducted extensive interviews with informants or obtained narrative written materials. These investigators each provide rich descriptions of psychologically relevant aspects of their informants' experiences vis-à-vis historical events. In addition, Nourkova and Brown (2015) give descriptive statistics for such substantive questions as how many of their respondents identified the collapse of the former Soviet Union as an important event in their lives.

In studying the intersection of history and psychology, scholars are often dealing with historical cases rather than randomized designs. Given the methodology (small samples and/or a case approach) and the nature of the subject matter (historical events) of many of the studies reported in this collection, controlling variables and eliminating alternative explanations appears more challenging in this domain. Yet the underlying type of questions asked by scholars studying the interface between psychology and history can bear a resemblance to questions asked in traditional quantitative research.

Consider the following examples. Akin to positivistic efforts to classify people and other entities into types or clusters, Nourkova and Brown (2015) are concerned with what they call "historically-defined autobiographical periods," cognitive structures (i.e., clusters) of period-specific knowledge. Bikmen (2015) provides a clear example of testing to see how an antecedent condition (group history) influenced behavior (intellectual performance). The consequences of historical events can be seen in several articles including in the life course histories of the Tuskegee Airman (Hunter & Rollins, 2015) as well as the lives—and the lives of their children—of Japanese individuals incarcerated during WWI (Nagata, Kim, & Nguyen, 2015). Bikmen took steps in her studies to rule out the influence of a successful role model as a plausible alternative to group history as an explanation of enhanced intellectual performance. Greenwood's (2015) study of how minority allies sought to influence majority members can be seen as a process study. Nourkova and Brown identify a moderator type variable when they suggest that historical events play an important role in organizing autobiographical memory when, but only when, those events have dramatic, long-lasting effects on people's material circumstances. Opotow (2015) examines how the scope of justice contracted and expanded over time, implicating historical events as a critical factor leading to these changes in scope of justice. Greenwood provides glimpses of the trajectory of change in describing public concern with the Tulsa Race Riots: dormant for years and then re-energized. Each of these examples can be matched to standard types of questions addressed in traditional quantitative research.

Cross-Cutting Themes

Social Injustice Shapes Identities

This volume was divided into three sections dealing with (1) human rights struggles, (2) processes of memory and identities in making historical events meaningful, and (3) how historical conflicts are reflected in people's attitudes, and emotional and behavioral responses years later. Nonetheless we also recognize that core themes cut across the three sections. For example, legacies of injustice—histories of exclusion, marginalization, and oppression—are central to the formation of social identities, as is illustrated in this issue through the prism of war and intergroup relations.

This legacy of injustice for identity is seen in articles in all three sections of the volume. For the Tuskegee Airmen (Section I), for whom WWII was viewed as a fight against fascism abroad and racism at home, the legacy of their military service and its meaning were defined within the context of the larger civil rights struggle, manhood, and African American identity (Hunter & Rollins, 2015). For Jewish survivors of the Holocaust (Section II), the suturing (i.e., recrafting) of their identities after WWII was a complex process. They had to work out contradictions among various levels of their identities (e.g., their own personal identities vs. the "communal" identity constructed by Holocaust survivors as a group) and dialectical tensions around disclosure versus nondisclosure of their experiences, autonomy from versus connection with being Jewish, and stability versus change (Schwartzman, 2015). Although such complexities may make identity formation more challenging, it can also serve survivors in coping with their traumas and regaining a sense of personal agency. The WWII internment of Japanese Americans (Section III) shaped postwar social identities (i.e., to be "super" American or to downplay a Japanese identity) as a response to trauma, shame, and silence and these effects were intergenerational (Nagata et al., 2015).

History Has Multiple Narratives

Mark Twain (1898) wrote: "The very ink with which all history is written is merely fluid prejudice" (Chapter 69, line 1). A second theme is that there are multiple narratives of historical events that reflect power inequities and/or inform current intergroup relations. For example, those who developed the Chilean museum wanted to make known the violations of human rights that occurred under Pinchot (Opotow, 2015). There was opposition to the Museum, however, from other factions of Chilean society whose members see Pinchot in a favorable light.

Perpetrators and victims undoubtedly often see events differently. On the one hand, as Glick and Paluck (2013, p. 202) note, "perpetrator group members have little incentive to acknowledge the past and strong motivation to create psychological distance from, minimize, reframe, or outright deny past harm-doing by their group." Vollhardt and Bilewicz (2013a) see a tendency among the descendants of perpetrators to see historical crimes as caused by unstable, situational factors; to exonerate their ancestors; to blame victims for their fates; and to see atrocities as temporally remote. On the other hand, as illustrated in the cases of the Museum of Memory and Human Rights (Opotow, 2015) and the sympathizers with the victims in the Tulsa riots, those on the victim side often want to preserve memories of atrocities. Although victims such as Holocaust survivors may have ambivalence about reliving atrocities (Schwartzman, 2015; Vollhardt & Bilewicz, 2013a), we find no evidence in this collection of victims blaming themselves for the injustices they have suffered. Instead, there are examples of Maya attributing their problems with the legal system to the racism of their oppressors—an external, stable attributional factor.

Often varying historical narratives inform current intergroup relations as seen, for example, in Greenwood's (2015) analysis of the Tulsa riots. She divides Tulsans into three groups: the majority of the citizens, the minority, and the authority (e.g., elected officials and others in positions of power). The White majority is in turn divided into those who ally with the minority and those who align with authority. Greenwood assumes these groups see the history of the Riots and what should be done now differently, with the majority and those in authority having historically had similar views. She believes the key to getting reparations for the Riots is to get the majority to reject the authority's position—to see it as illegitimate (i.e., wrong) and to adopt views aligned with those of the minority. Among the ways White allies of the Black minority attempted to win over others to the minority viewpoint was to get members of the majority to see themselves as having connections with the riot victims, to appreciate the trauma the Riots caused Tulsa's Black citizens, and to see the longer-term costs the Riots had for all Tulsans. The influence attempts also included engaging narratives of current responsibility cum White privilege and exhortations for White Tulsans to provide reparation. Not only do such influence efforts have the potential to align the majority's views with those of the minority, but they also they have the potential to transform the majority group's identity.

Similarly, the post-WWII history of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is interpreted through different historical narratives that typically reify the power asymmetry between Palestinians and Israeli today and serve as a barrier to conflict resolution in which past or current injustices are implicated (Hammack & Pilecki, 2015). The evolution of the feminist movement, demonstrates how some narratives or representations of its past (e.g., emphasizing physical aspects of women's bodies) recede while others continue, a response to internal and external challenges, with implications for political action and feminist identity (Fahs, 2015).

Responses to Social Histories Are Shaped by Multiple Forces

The responses to social histories, as mediated by emotions, identity and self-representations, and interpretative narratives, are examined in different ways in this issue. Yet together these investigations demonstrate how individual psychologies, social groups, and publics and their intersection contribute to the ways history becomes psychologically meaningful. The interpretation of one's own biography in reference to self-perceived injustice and group identity can shape group and politicized identities leading to sustained political action as in the cases of the Tuskegee Airman and the 1968 high school graduates (Hunter & Rollins, 2015; Stewart et al., 2015). For individuals who identify with excluded or marginalized social groups, being reminded of their group's history of achievement and resilience enhanced intellectual performance in domains where stereotype threat is experienced (Bikmen, 2015). Confrontational approaches to intergroup dialogue that disrupt power differentials in the positioning of historical narratives (as in the case of the Israeli and Palestinians) can also impact the social influence of marginalized groups that are allowed to assert their own narratives and social identities (Hammack & Pilecki, 2015).

Within social groups and movements there are also shifts in what is represented or taught about its legacies with implications not only for how its history is viewed but also its meaning for collective action and politicized identity (Fahs, 2015; Greenwood, 2015; Hunter & Rollins, 2015; Schwartzman, 2015). However, social movements and historical events that transform publics may not transform all individuals (Stewart et al., 2015) particularly when the daily experiences of people's lives are unchanged, or, as in the case of the collapse of the former Soviet Union, if social and cultural institutions do not also engage in making meaning of those events (Nourkova & Brown, 2015).

The influences of social histories, with their legacies of injustice and socially traumatic events, reverberate across generations within families, across social groups, and for publics in ways that are psychologically meaningful. The investigations in this issue highlight the transgenerational influences of history on individual psychologies of Maya and Japanese Americans via intergenerational family patterns of trauma and coping (Lykes & Hershberg, 2015; Nagata et al., 2015), transgenerational intergroup relations and conflict in Tulsa and Israel (Greenwood, 2015; Hammack & Pilecki, 2015); and the self-defined legacies, testimonies, and public representations of history and (in) justice left for current and future generations (Fahs, 2015; Hunter & Rollins, 2015; Schwartzman, 2015). These inter- and transgenerational effects may lead groups within society to confront their legacies of injustice (Opotow, 2015; Nagata et al., 2015).

Policy Implications

The ways histories of social (in) justice are psychologically meaningful and relevant for social groups and publics also highlight the significance of these investigations for public policy and social problems including current hot-button social issues. As a first example, Lykes and Hershberg (2015) argue that 21st century immigration reform should consider global citizenship, human rights, and support immigration practices that acknowledge group histories of trauma.

The Role of Identity and Group Boundaries

A recurrent policy-relevant thread across several articles is the role of maintaining identities and group boundaries. Schwartzman (2015) sees having a group-based identity as important for resisting oppression and getting group members to contribute to the well-being of their own community. Hunter and Rollins (2015) have a somewhat similar position. On the heels of the Supreme Court decision on *Fisher v. University of Texas* (narrowing the conditions under which universities can apply Affirmative Action principles in student admissions) and *Shelby County v. Holder* (striking down a key provision of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 meant to prevent racially discriminatory practice), Hunter and Rollins note that "racial disparities persist in every arena of American life." Their example of the Tuskegee Airman points to the current and continued importance of racial group identity for race-specific advocacy and political activism aimed at public policy or judicial redress of racial inequality.

Further amplifying this thread, Stewart et al. (2015) suggest that leaders can play a role for particular groups by articulating the group-based relevance of events, past and present. In their study, Malcolm X's influence on Martin exemplifies this dynamic. In an experimental study, Bikmen (2015) found that the identity of a stigmatized group, when invoked with an emphasis on positive aspects of group history and accomplishment, may serve as an antidote to the psychological impact of negative stereotypes on excluded groups. This finding, if implemented in educational programs or public service campaigns, could have long-term consequences for the achievement of racial and gender equity. Patterns of intergroup relations and conflict can also be addressed by attention to the stories that shore up social representations of exclusion and power inequities—each with implications for public policy. Hammack and Pilecki (2015) demonstrate that a confrontational approach to intergroup work and conflict resolution within which power asymmetries can be disrupted is more effective than coexistence approaches, which more often reproduce inequities. However, there is also need to disrupt essentialized group identities that then become targets of discrimination and violence or that constrain possibilities for individual identity, as Schwartzman (2015) argues.

Our last identity-related example is Fahs' (2015) discussion of the feminist movement. She argues that between the Second and Third Waves of the Feminist Movement, emphases on political activism and physical aspects of women's bodies (e.g., orgasm training, self-defense classes) as a part of the feminist ideology or identity got lost. As the leadership of the Feminist Movement passed from Second Wave activists to Third Wave academics, discussions of the body took a more abstract, cerebral direction often getting into the theoretical foundations of feminist thought. Fahs contends that merging aspects of the both the Second and Third Waves of feminism will lead to more effective policy advocacy. She states:

> By drawing from both the powerful intersectional critiques of the third wave and the second wave's notion that the actual female body can serve as a critical site of rebellion, organizing for social and reproductive justice at the policy level (especially as targeted towards women's health) can become more effective, personal, multi-generational, and visible.

Addressing Past Injustices

The authors in this issue also get into questions pertaining to the public addressing historical events, especially making amends for past injustice, and their legacies. One question pertains to the social issues and problems that garner attention. Here Fahs' (2015) analysis of Second and Third Wave Feminism is relevant. She illustrates how pedagogy and teaching is one important vehicle for understanding injustice and a force contributing to the evolution of the aspects of injustice on which social movements focus. How some aspects of history are represented within groups and passed on, while others are not, matters. This has implications for the policy aims of those in social movements, how politicized identities of those in such movements are personally enacted, and the concerns about which those in authority formulate social policies.

For victims of injustice and their allies, the process of seeking redress, even when it is only partially successful, can be important. It can lead to opportunities for identity construction and elaboration as can be seen in the Tuskegee Airman (Hunter & Rollins, 2015), residents of Tulsa (Greenwood, 2015), Japanese Americans (Nagata et al., 2015) affected by WWII internment, and feminists (Fahs, 2015).

Dealing with past events is not, however, solely a bottoms up process. The authors of two articles in this volume point to the part institutions have in addressing past events. Opotow (2015) suggests that museums, as repositories of memory, should play a role in bringing forward what has been silenced and supporting dialogues about justice, past and present, with a dialogue about who is counted within the moral sphere. She believes such dialogue can diffuse conflict. Nourkova and Brown (2015) found surprisingly little impact of the collapse of the Soviet Union in their study. They attribute this to the fact that the collapse was not perceived to have a dramatic and long-lasting impact on people's lives. Under those circumstances they see institutional and cultural representations as shaping the collective understanding of historical events.

Another question is "What are effective ways to seek reparation for injustices?" In analyzing what happened in Tulsa, Greenwood (2015) argues policymakers, politicians, or citizen groups who seek reparative actions must find ways to address the emotions and group identities of advantaged groups who were responsible for those injustices. Although arousing negative emotions (e.g., guilt, remorse) may have some role in minorities and their allies advocating for reparation, Greenwood concludes that arousing more positive emotions such as the majority group's sense of pride, accomplishments, and being blessed is more effective.

As previously noted, perpetrators of social injustices often avoid acknowledging social injustices, in part because this would require them to accept responsibilities for past wrong doings. Some efforts to obtain redress for injustices fail or are delayed many years before they are achieved (e.g., Greenwood, 2015). If no resolution occurs, continued trauma may result as in the impacts of U.S. detention and deportation policies of Central American immigrants with histories of violence and multiple traumas (Lykes & Hershberg, 2015) or as in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Hammack & Pilecki, 2015).

On the positive side, however, social trauma and legacies of injustice publically acknowledged through state apologies, reparations (Greenwood, 2015; Nagata et al., 2015), shifts in public perceptions (Hunter & Rollins, 2015) or teaching (Fahs, 2015), and/or public remembrance (e.g., museums; Opotow, 2015) can serve as sources of healing and define anew a just world. For example, Hunter and Rollins' (2015) Tuskegee Airman experienced pride in their WWII accomplishments. For many, it was a springboard for success and opening doors later in life. For at least some 3rd generation Japanese Americans, U.S. reparations for the Japanese internment resulted in the restitution of a sense of a just world (Nagata et al., 2015). It would be naive to say "all is well that ends well," but there can be growth and positive experiences on the other side of injustices.

An overarching, meta-policy implication of these investigations derives from the fact that history is not only what is past. Past injustices and their inter- and transgenerational effects may need to be healed through memory and acknowledgement, often via judicial or legislative means. Even with amelioration, the legacy of history persists. Thus, policymakers must be sensitive to the histories of groups which become the filters through which the impact of contemporary policies is felt.

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